

# PRESENT COLLEGE QUESTIONS

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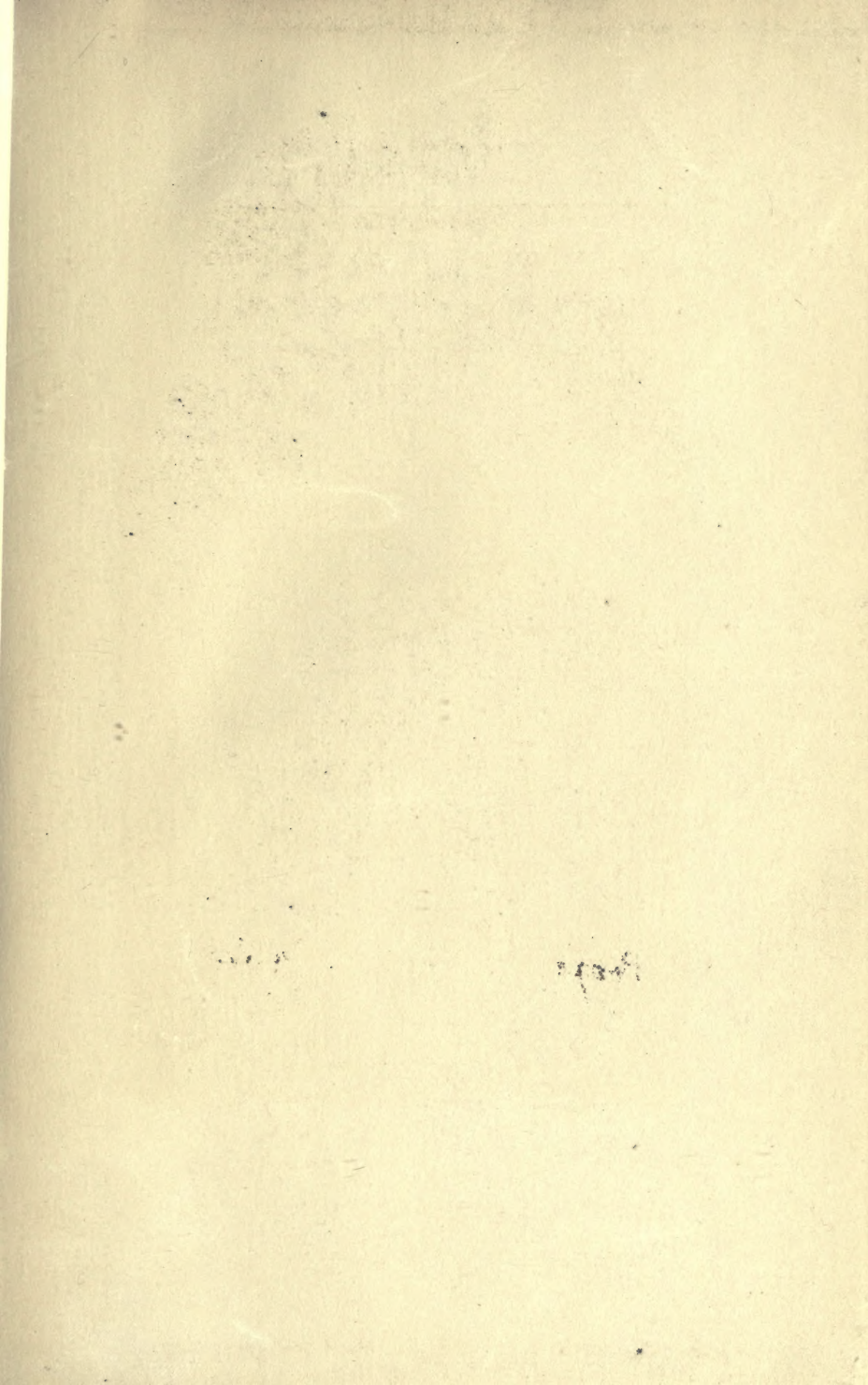
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**PRESENT COLLEGE QUESTIONS**





# PRESENT COLLEGE QUESTIONS

SIX PAPERS READ BEFORE THE NATIONAL  
EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION, AT THE SES-  
SIONS HELD IN BOSTON, JULY 6 AND 7, 1903

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## PUBLISHERS' NOTE

THE six papers printed in this book were received with extraordinary interest at the time of their delivery last July before the National Educational Association in Boston, and still continue to be the subject of widespread public comment. They form a closely connected series of short discussions by representative men of leading universities on those questions of college education which are now arousing the keenest discussion in educational circles throughout the land. The acute conflict between the rival ideals of liberal education, the increasing demands of the secondary and professional schools, and the consequent problem of the survival of the American college, are the grave questions involved in the debate. To preserve in accessible form these notable discussions of the largest and most important educational gathering ever held in America, the six papers, by permission of their writers, are issued in this volume for the first time in collected form and in the order in which they were delivered.

NOVEMBER, 1903.





A NEW DEFINITION OF THE  
CULTIVATED MAN

BY

CHARLES W. ELIOT  
PRESIDENT OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY





## A NEW DEFINITION OF THE CULTIVATED MAN<sup>1</sup>

To produce the cultivated man, or at least the man capable of becoming cultivated in after life, has long been supposed to be one of the fundamental objects of systematic and thorough education. The ideal of general cultivation has been one of the standards in education. It is often asked: Will the education which a given institution is supplying produce the cultivated man? Or, can cultivation be the result of a given course of study? In such questions there is an implication that the education which does not produce the cultivated man is a failure, or has been misconceived or misdirected. Now if cultivation were an unchanging ideal, the steady use of the conception as a permanent test of educational processes might be justified; but if the cultivated man of to-day is, or ought to be, a dis-

<sup>1</sup> Read before the National Educational Association at its Boston meeting, general session, Monday evening, July 6, 1903.

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tinctly different creature from the cultivated man of a century ago, the ideal of cultivation can not be appealed to as a standard without preliminary explanations and interpretations. It is the object of this paper to show that the idea of cultivation in the highly trained human being has undergone substantial changes during the nineteenth century.

I ought to say at once that I propose to use the term cultivated man in only its good sense—in Emerson's sense. In this paper he is not to be a weak, critical, fastidious creature, vain of a little exclusive information or of an uncommon knack in Latin verse or mathematical logic: he is to be a man of quick perceptions, broad sympathies, and wide affinities, responsive but independent, self-reliant but deferential, loving truth and candor but also moderation and proportion, courageous but gentle, not finished but perfecting. All authorities agree that true culture is not exclusive, sectarian, or partisan, but the very opposite; that it is not to be attained in solitude, but in society; and that the best atmosphere for culture is that of a school, university, academy, or



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church, where many pursue together the ideals of truth, righteousness, and love.

Here some one may think this process of cultivation is evidently a long, slow, artificial process. I prefer the genius, the man of native power or skill, the man whose judgment is sound and influence strong, though he can not read or write—the born inventor, orator, or poet. So do we all. Men have always revered prodigious in-born gifts, and always will. Indeed, barbarous men always say of the possessors of such gifts—these are not men; they are gods. But we teachers, who carry on a system of popular education, which is by far the most complex and valuable invention of the nineteenth century, know that we have to do, not with the highly gifted units, but with the millions who are more or less capable of being cultivated by the long, patient, artificial training called education. For us and our system the genius is no standard, but the cultivated man is. To his stature we and many of our pupils may in time attain.

There are two principal differences between the present ideal and that which pre-

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veiled at the beginning of the nineteenth century. All thinkers agree that the horizon of the human intellect has widened wonderfully during the past hundred years, and that the scientific method of inquiry, which was known to but very few when the nineteenth century began, has been the means of that widening. This method has become indispensable in all fields of inquiry, including psychology, philanthropy, and religion, and, therefore, intimate acquaintance with it has become an indispensable element in culture. As Matthew Arnold pointed out more than a generation ago, educated mankind is governed by two passions—one the passion for pure knowledge, the other the passion for being of service or doing good. Now, the passion for pure knowledge is only to be gratified through the scientific method of inquiry. In Arnold's phrases, the first step for every aspirant to culture is to endeavor to see things as they are, or "to learn, in short, the Will of God." The second step is to make that Will prevail, each in his own sphere of action and influence. This recognition of science as pure knowledge, and of the scientific method as



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the universal method of inquiry, is the great addition made by the nineteenth century to the idea of culture. I need not say that within that century what we call science, pure and applied, has transformed the world as the scene of the human drama; and that it is this transformation which has compelled the recognition of natural science as a fundamental necessity in liberal education. The most convinced exponents and advocates of humanism now recognize that science is the "paramount force of the modern as distinguished from the antique and the medieval spirit" (John Addington Symonds—"Culture") and that "an interpenetration of humanism with science and of science with humanism is the condition of the highest culture."

A second modification of the earlier idea of cultivation was advocated by Ralph Waldo Emerson more than two generations ago. He taught that the acquisition of some form of manual skill and the practise of some form of manual labor were essential elements of culture. This idea has more and more become accepted in the systematic education of youth; and if we include ath-

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letic sports among the desirable forms of manual skill and labor, we may say that during the last thirty years this element of excellence of body in the ideal of education has had a rapid, even an exaggerated, development. The idea of some sort of bodily excellence was, to be sure, not absent in the old conception of the cultivated man. The gentleman could ride well, dance gracefully, and fence with skill; but the modern conception of bodily skill as an element in cultivation is more comprehensive, and includes that habitual contact with the external world which Emerson deemed essential to real culture. We have lately become convinced that accurate work with carpenters' tools, or lathe, or hammer and anvil, or violin, or piano, or pencil, or crayon, or camel's-hair brush, trains well the same nerves and ganglia with which we do what is ordinarily called thinking. We have also become convinced that some intimate, sympathetic acquaintance with the natural objects of the earth and sky adds greatly to the happiness of life, and that this acquaintance should be begun in childhood and be developed all through adolescence and ma-



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turity. A brook, a hedgerow, or a garden is an inexhaustible teacher of wonder, reverence, and love. The scientists insist to-day on nature-study for children; but we teachers ought long ago to have learned from the poets the value of this element in education. They are the best advocates of nature-study. If any here are not convinced of its worth, let them go to Theocritus, Virgil, Wordsworth, Tennyson, or Lowell for the needed demonstration. Let them observe, too, that a great need of modern industrial society is intellectual pleasures, or pleasures which, like music, combine delightful sensations with the gratifications of observation, association, memory, and sympathy. The idea of culture has always included a quick and wide sympathy with men; it should hereafter include sympathy with Nature, and particularly with its living forms—a sympathy based on some accurate observation of Nature. The book-worm, the monk, the isolated student, has never been the type of the cultivated man. Society has seemed the natural setting for the cultivated person, man or woman; but the present conception of real culture con-

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tains not only a large development of this social element, but also an extension of interest and reverence to the animate creation and to those immense forces that set the earthly stage for man and all related beings.

Let us now proceed to examine some of the changes in the idea of culture, or in the available means of culture, which the last hundred years have brought about.

1. The moral sense of the modern world makes character a more important element than it used to be in the ideal of a cultivated man. Now character is formed, as Goethe said, in the "stream of the world"—not in stillness or isolation, but in the quick-flowing tides of the busy world, the world of nature and the world of mankind. At the end of the nineteenth century the world was wonderfully different from the world at the beginning of that eventful period; and, moreover, men's means of making acquaintance with the world were vastly more ample than they were a hundred years earlier. To the old idea of culture some knowledge of history was indispensable. Now history is a representation of the stream of the world, or of some little portion of that stream, one

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hundred, five hundred, two thousand years ago. Acquaintance with some part of the present stream ought to be more formative of character, and more instructive as regards external nature and the nature of man, than any partial survey of the stream that was flowing centuries ago. We have, then, through the present means of reporting the stream of the world from day to day, material for culture such as no preceding generation of men has possessed. The cultivated man or woman must use the means which steam and electricity have provided for reporting the play of physical forces and of human volitions which make the world of to-day; for the world of to-day supplies in its immense variety a picture of all stages of human progress, from the Stone Age, through savagery, barbarism, and medievalism, to what we now call civilization. The rising generation should think hard and feel keenly, just where the men and women who constitute the actual human world are thinking and feeling most to-day. The panorama of to-day's events is not an accurate or complete picture, for history will supply posterity with much evidence which is hid-



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den from the eyes of contemporaries; but it is nevertheless an invaluable and a new means of developing good judgment, good feeling, and the passion for social service, or, in other words, of securing cultivation. But some one will say the stream of the world is foul. True in part. The stream is, what it has been, a mixture of foulness and purity, of meanness and majesty; but it has nourished individual virtue and race civilization. Literature and history are a similar mixture, and yet are the traditional means of culture. Are not the Greek tragedies means of culture? Yet they are full of incest, murder, and human sacrifices to lustful and revengeful gods.

2. A cultivated man should express himself by tongue or pen with some accuracy and elegance; therefore linguistic training has had great importance in the idea of cultivation. The conditions of the educated world have, however, changed so profoundly since the revival of learning in Italy that our inherited ideas concerning training in language and literature have required large modifications. In the year 1400 it might have been said with truth that there was but

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one language of scholars, the Latin, and but two great literatures, the Hebrew and the Greek. Since that time, however, other great literatures have arisen, the Italian, Spanish, French, German, and above all the English, which has become incomparably the most extensive and various and the noblest of literatures. Under these circumstances it is impossible to maintain that a knowledge of any particular literature is indispensable to culture. Yet we can not but feel that the cultivated man ought to possess a considerable acquaintance with the literature of some great language, and the power to use the native language in a pure and interesting way. Thus, we are not sure that Robert Burns could be properly described as a cultivated man, moving poet though he was. We do not think of Abraham Lincoln as a cultivated man, master of English speech and writing though he was. These men do not correspond to the type represented by the word cultivated, but belong in the class of geniuses. When we ask ourselves why a knowledge of literature seems indispensable to the ordinary idea of cultivation, we find no answer except this:

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that in literature are portrayed all human passions, desires, and aspirations, and that acquaintance with these human feelings, and with the means of portraying them, seems to us essential to culture. These human qualities and powers are also the commonest ground of interesting human intercourse, and therefore literary knowledge exalts the quality and enhances the enjoyment of human intercourse. It is in conversation that cultivation tells as much as anywhere, and this rapid exchange of thoughts is by far the commonest manifestation of its power. Combine the knowledge of literature with knowledge of the "stream of the world" and you have united two large sources of the influence of the cultivated person. The linguistic and literary element in cultivation therefore abides, but has become vastly broader than formerly—so broad, indeed, that selection among its various fields is forced upon every educated youth.

3. The next great element in cultivation to which I ask your attention is acquaintance with some parts of the store of knowledge which humanity in its progress from barbarism has acquired and laid up. This



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is the prodigious store of recorded, rationalized, and systematized discoveries, experiences, and ideas. This is the store which we teachers try to pass on to the rising generation. The capacity to assimilate this store and improve it in each successive generation is the distinction of the human race over other animals. It is too vast for any man to master, though he had a hundred lives instead of one; and its growth in the nineteenth century was greater than in all the thirty preceding centuries put together. In the eighteenth century a diligent student with strong memory and quick powers of apprehension need not have despaired of mastering a large fraction of this store of knowledge. Long before the end of the nineteenth century such a task had become impossible. Culture, therefore, can no longer imply a knowledge of everything—not even a little knowledge of everything. It must be content with general knowledge of some things, and a real mastery of some small portion of the human store. Here is a profound modification of the idea of cultivation, which the nineteenth century has brought about. What portion or portions

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of the infinite human store are most proper to the cultivated man? The answer must be, those which enable him, with his individual personal qualities, to deal best and sympathize most with Nature and with other human beings. It is here that the passion for service must fuse with the passion for knowledge. It is natural to imagine that the young man who has acquainted himself with economics, the science of government, sociology, and the history of civilization in its motives, objects, and methods has a better chance of fusing the passion for knowledge with the passion for doing good than the man whose passion for pure knowledge leads him to the study of chemical or physical phenomena, or of the habits and climatic distribution of plants or animals. Yet, so intricate are the relations of human beings to the animate and inanimate creation that it is impossible to foresee with what realms of nature intense human interests may prove to be identified. Thus the generation now on the stage has suddenly learned that some of the most sensitive and exquisite human interests, such as health or disease and life or death for those we love,

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are bound up with the life histories of parasites on the blood-corpuscles or of certain varieties of mosquitoes and ticks. When the spectra of the sun, stars, and other lights began to be studied, there was not the slightest anticipation that a cure for one of the most horrible diseases to which mankind is liable might be found in the X-rays. While, then, we can still see that certain subjects afford more obvious or frequent access to means of doing good and to fortunate intercourse with our fellows than other subjects, we have learned from nineteenth-century experience that there is no field of real knowledge which may not suddenly prove contributory in a high degree to human happiness and the progress of civilization, and therefore acceptable as a worthy element in the truest culture.

4. The only other element in cultivation which time will permit me to treat is the training of the constructive imagination. The imagination is the greatest of human powers, no matter in what field it works—in art or literature, in mechanical invention, in science, government, commerce, or religion; and the training of the imagination is,



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therefore, far the most important part of education. I use the term constructive imagination because that implies the creation or building of a new thing. The sculptor, for example, imagines or conceives the perfect form of a child ten years of age; he has never seen such a thing, for a child perfect in form is never produced; he has only seen in different children the elements of perfection, here one element and there another. In his imagination he combines these elements of the perfect form, which he has only seen separated, and from this picture in his mind he carves the stone, and in the execution invariably loses his ideal—that is, falls short of it or fails to express it. Sir Joshua Reynolds points out that the painter can picture only what he has somewhere seen; but that the more he has seen and noted the surer he is to be original in his painting, because his imaginary combinations will be original. Constructive imagination is the great power of the poet as well as of the artist; and the nineteenth century has convinced us that it is also the great power of the man of science, the investigator, and the natural philosopher. What

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gives every great naturalist or physicist his epoch-making results is precisely the imaginative power by which he deduces from the masses of fact the guiding hypothesis or principle.

The educated world needs to recognize the new varieties of constructive imagination. Dante gave painful years to picturing on many pages of his immortal Comedy of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise the most horrible monsters and tortures and the most loathsome and noisome abominations that his fervid imagination could concoct out of his own bitter experiences and the manners and customs of his cruel times. Sir Charles Lyell spent many laborious years in searching for and putting together the scattered evidences that the geologic processes by which the crust of the earth has been made ready for the use of man have been, in the main, not catastrophic, but gradual and gentle, and that the forces which have been in action through past ages are, for the most part, similar to those we may see to-day eroding hills, cutting cañons, making placers, marshes, and meadows, and forming prairies and ocean floors. He first

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imagined, and then demonstrated, that the geologic agencies are not explosive and cataclysmal, but steady and patient. These two kinds of imagination—Dante's and Lyell's—are not comparable, but both are manifestations of great human power. Zola, in *La Bête Humaine*, contrives that ten persons, all connected with the railroad from Paris to Havre, shall be either murderers or murdered, or both, within eighteen months; and he adds two railroad slaughters criminally procured. The conditions of time and place are ingeniously imagined, and no detail is omitted which can heighten the effect of this homicidal fiction. Contrast this kind of constructive imagination with the kind which conceived the great wells sunk in the solid rock below Niagara that contain the turbines that drive the dynamos that generate the electric force that turns thousands of wheels and lights thousands of lamps over hundreds of square miles of adjoining territory; or with the kind which conceives the sending of human thoughts across three thousand miles of stormy sea instantaneously on nothing more substantial than ethereal waves. There is no



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crime, cruelty, or lust about these last two sorts of imagining. No lurid fire of hell or human passion illumines their scenes. They are calm, accurate, just, and responsible, and nothing but beneficence and increased human well-being results from them. There is going to be room in the hearts of twentieth-century men for a high admiration of these kinds of imagination, as well as for that of the poet, artist, or dramatist.

Another kind of imagination deserves a moment's consideration—the receptive imagination which entertains and holds fast the visions which genius creates or the analogies of nature suggest. A young woman is absorbed for hours in conning the squalid scenes and situations through which Thackeray portrays the malign motives and unclean soul of Becky Sharp. Another young woman watches for days the pairing, nesting, brooding, and foraging of two robins that have established home and family in the notch of a maple near her window. She notes the unselfish labors of the father and mother for each other and for their little ones, and weaves into the simple drama all sorts of protective instincts

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and human affections. Here are two employments for the receptive imagination. Shall systematic education compel the first but make no room for the second? The increasing attention to nature-study suggests the hope that the imaginative study of human ills and woes is not to be allowed to exclude the imaginative study of Nature, and that both studies may count toward culture.

It is one lesson of the nineteenth century, then, that in every field of human knowledge the constructive imagination finds play—in literature, in history, in theology, in anthropology, and in the whole field of physical and biological research. That great century has taught us that, on the whole, the scientific imagination is quite as productive for human service as the literary or poetic imagination. The imagination of Darwin or Pasteur, for example, is as high and productive a form of imagination as that of Dante, or Goethe, or even Shakespeare, if we regard the human uses which result from the exercise of imaginative powers, and mean by human uses not merely meat and drink, clothes and shelter, but also

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the satisfaction of mental and spiritual needs. We must, therefore, allow in our contemplation of the cultivated man a large expansion of the fields in which the cultivated imagination may be exercised. We must extend our training of the imagination beyond literature and the fine arts, to history, philosophy, science, government, and sociology. We must recognize the prodigious variety of fruits of the imagination that the nineteenth century has given to our race.

It results from this brief survey that the elements and means of cultivation are much more numerous than they used to be; so that it is not wise to say of any one acquisition or faculty—with it cultivation becomes possible, without it impossible. The one acquisition or faculty may be immense, and yet cultivation may not have been attained. Thus it is obvious that a man may have a wide acquaintance with music, and possess great musical skill and that wonderful imaginative power which conceives delicious melodies and harmonies for the delight of mankind through centuries, and yet not be a cultivated man in the ordinary acceptance of the words. We have met artists who



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were rude and uncouth, yet possessed a high degree of technical skill and strong powers of imagination. We have seen philanthropists and statesmen whose minds have played on great causes and great affairs, and yet who lacked a correct use of their native language, and had no historical perspective or background of historical knowledge.

On the other hand, is there any single acquisition or faculty which is essential to culture, except indeed a reasonably accurate and refined use of the mother tongue?

Again, though we can discern in different individuals different elements of the perfect type of cultivated man, we seldom find combined in any human being all the elements of the type. Here, as in painting or sculpture, we make up our ideal from traits picked out from many imperfect individuals and put together. We must not, therefore, expect systematic education to produce multitudes of highly cultivated and symmetrically developed persons; the multitudinous product will always be imperfect, just as there are no perfect trees, animals, flowers, or crystals.

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It has been my object to point out that our conception of the type of cultivated man has been greatly enlarged, and on the whole exalted, by observation of the experiences of mankind during the last hundred years. Let us as teachers accept no single element or kind of culture as the one essential; let us remember that the best fruits of real culture are an open mind, broad sympathies, and respect for all the diverse achievements of the human intellect at whatever stage of development they may actually be—the stage of fresh discovery, or bold exploration, or complete conquest. Let us remember that the moral elements of the new education are individual choice of studies and career among a great, new variety of studies and careers, early responsibility accompanying this freedom of choice, love of truth now that truth may be directly sought through rational inquiry, and an omnipresent sense of social obligation. These moral elements are so strong that the new forms of culture are likely to prove themselves quite as productive of morality, high-mindedness, and idealism as the old.





**THE PRESENT PERIL TO  
LIBERAL EDUCATION**

BY

**ANDREW F. WEST**

**DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY**



## THE PRESENT PERIL TO LIBERAL EDUCATION<sup>1</sup>

LIBERAL education, like political liberty, is always worth preserving and always in peril. In such causes, if anywhere, men need to be ever resolute as well as intelligent, for only thus does it become possible, even when distressed, to face grave crises without becoming for an instant pessimistic, inasmuch as the priceless value of what we are seeking to defend assures us that our efforts are well worth making and that no effort is too great in maintaining so good a cause.

We have such a cause to-day, the cause of liberal education. I need not argue in this presence that as it prevails our American life is lifted, and that as it fails our American life is degraded. It is to-day, as ever, in peril, but in unusual peril as embodied

<sup>1</sup> Read before the National Educational Association at its Boston meeting, general session, Monday evening, July 6, 1903.



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in its noblest representative, the American college.

Let us picture the situation in its worst possible outcome. Suppose the chances are that the college is to fail, to be crushed out between the upper and nether millstones of professional and secondary schools by reason of the violent demand for something more "practical." What then? If it must go, it must go, of course. But ought it to go? And if not, ought it to go without a struggle? Those who know most about colleges think not, while those who know least about them—and they form a huge majority—are often indifferent and sometimes hostile. Scarcely one in a hundred of our young men of college age has gone to college. This little band of alumni, at least, is with the college, and so is the rest of the better intelligence of the land. But educated intelligence does not always prevail over ignorance, even in deciding matters of education. One can hardly fail, when painting the danger at its blackest, to recall the great words of Stein, when appealing to his fellow Prussians in the Napoleonic wars: "We must look the possibility of failure

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firmly in the face, and consider well . . . that this contest is begun less in regard to the probability of success than to the certainty that without it destruction is not to be avoided."

It is by no means as black as that, nor does it seem likely to become so. But even if the peril were far greater than it is, there would be no good reason why we should not continue the struggle. There is good reason to believe the forces with us are strong enough, not only to save, but to strengthen the American college, and that when once its real value is brought home anew to the minds and consciences of men, it will assert its rights with ample power.

Let us think for a moment of what the American college is. It has been evolved out of our own needs and has proved its extraordinary usefulness by a long record. It has been democratic in its freedom of access and in the prevailing tone of its life. It has furnished our society and state with a small army of well-trained men. In it supremely are centered our best hopes for liberal education, both as focused in the college itself and as radiating outward on the

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secondary schools below and the professional schools above. It is the best available safeguard against the mechanical cramping of an unliberalized technical education. It is our one available center of organization for true universities. It has produced a class of men unequalled in beneficent influence by any other class of equal numbers in our history.

In the rush of American life it has stood as the quiet and convincing teacher of higher things. It has been preparing young men for a better career in the world by withdrawing them a while from the world to cultivate their minds and hearts by contact with things intellectual and spiritual in a society devoted to those invisible things on which the abiding greatness of our life depends. By reason of this training most college men have become better than they would have been, and better in important respects than they could have been, had they not gone to college. Their vision has been cleared and widened, and their aims have been elevated. Not least of all, they have been taught incessantly the lesson, so deeply needed to steady them in our fiercely prac-



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tical surroundings, that the making of a good living is not so important as the making of a good life. The college has proved its right to live. To preserve, maintain, and energize it to its highest capacity for good, to prune its excesses, strengthen its weak places and supply its needs is therefore the bounden duty of those who care for the best interests of our nation.

The perils which beset it come from various sources—first, from the common defects of our American civilization; second, from the weaker tendencies in young men; and third, from the confusion of counsels inside the college itself. The first two we must be prepared to encounter always, but the last one ought to be avoidable.

This is no place to draw up a catalogue of our common defects as a people. Our virtues we know well. They are self-reliance, quick ingenuity, adventurousness, and a buoyant optimism. Our national faults are not so pleasant to think of—as, for example, the faults of boastful vulgarity and reckless excitability. Yet there are some that must be mentioned as being specially perilous to our college education. The chief

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one, I think, is commercialism, the feverish pursuit of what "pays" as the one end of life. Are we not subjected to-day, as never before, to demands for teaching the things of commerce as part of the college course? And are not the mechanical arts and crafts, admirable indeed in their true uses, trying to mix in with the other things as though they were of the same family of studies, and saying they must have room in the same house even if other members of the family are pushed out. Are not technical studies being called liberal, and is not even the technique of the professions sometimes labeled liberal also, on the plea that all knowledge is liberalizing? So it is, but in what differing degrees and senses! The instinct for the useful is being perverted and exalted above the love of knowledge as a chief end. And why? Because what is wanted is something immediately, obviously, almost mercenarily useful. Is it not time we read again the books of philosophy to learn again that the true utility is the long utility which serves to make a whole life useful, and that it is the end for which men live that makes them useful or useless? Do we not feel that

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we are here coming close to the sanctions of religion and need to answer that deep question, What shall it profit a man? once more.

Another peril is a companion and natural follower of commercialism, namely, illiteracy. Not in the meaning of that word in the census tables, but in the meaning of ignorance of good literature. "No man can serve books and mammon," said Richard de Bury long ago. Is it not a fact that the majority of college students to-day are not familiar with the commonplaces of literary information and the standard books of history, poetry, and so on. Do they know that greatest book of our tongue, the English Bible, as their fathers did? What have so many of them been reading? The newspapers, of course, and fiction—not always the better fiction. As between books and the short stories in magazines, how few read the former! I am not now speaking of the hard books of philosophy and science, or generally of the books that involve severe thought, but of the readable, delightful books, the pleasant classics of English. What a confession of the state of things it is that colleges have to make the reading of

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a few books of English literature a set task as an entrance requirement, and then ask formal questions on what ought to be the free and eager reading of every boy at home. How far it is true that the advocacy of teaching science may have operated, not to beget a taste for science, but merely a neglect of literature, is perhaps idle to ask.

It is at least true that these neglecters of literature are not usually giving laborious hours to reading scientific works. Perhaps some day our schools generally will get "Readers" that have literature in them, and that will help matters a little. But the so-called students who do not care to read, or do not know how to read as all students should, are with us in abundance as an ever-present peril. The quiet book by the quiet lamp is a good charmer. Here the true student forms his friendships with the masters of thought and fancy; here they speak to him not under the constraints of the classroom; here he may relax without weakness, adventure without limit, soar without fear, and hope without end. It is the old story. Books are, as Huxley put it, "his main helpers," and the free reading outside the



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set tasks is, perhaps next to music, his most ennobling pleasure. The loss of this is to-day the thing that does so much to deprive our college life and conversation of the fine flavor of that much misunderstood thing, Culture.

Another peril comes from the students themselves. It is a disposition to do the pleasant rather than the hard thing, even when the hard thing happens to be the best thing. This is most common among those whose main interest in college life is social. It is also fostered by the general absorption in athletics, though it is not so much the athletes who are affected—for they are at least used to a vigorous discipline in things physical—as it is the mass of onlookers who attend the games and waste so much time discussing them. This social and athletic environment, with all its undeniable and, I believe, indispensable good, is just now doing much harm to the intellectual life of students. Because it is unduly exaggerated it is operating powerfully to disperse the student's energies in a miscellany of things outside his studies. Things which should come second, as the relaxation of those whose

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first business is study, often come first, and studies must get what they can of what is left. How natural it is that such students should crowd into the easier courses. They have little interest left for anything intellectual. So far as this occurs, liberal education dies and college students come to their manhood with men's bodies and boys' minds. What is being lost is the development of virile intellectual power, a thing which simply can not grow without exercise.

This is a matter which goes far below the question of one or another plan of studies, though it is greatly affected by the relative wisdom or unwisdom of what the student is offered. If he finds a course which impels him and his comrades to regular effort day by day, and also gives him the immense help that comes to all young men of ordinary abilities from moving together with their fellows in the same direction, his progress in studies is part of the orderly advance of a march, with little chance for straggling or loitering. If he is confused by failure to discover that there is a rational order of studies or that his college believes there is at least some preferable order for the mass

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of students, he thus loses much or all of a kind of help he ought to have. If the educated experience of his college can not tell him, at least approximately, what things he ought to take and some definite things which all college students ought to take, how is he to find out with any strong probability that he is going straight on the right road? Those who are so ready to move an indefinite distance along any of the diverging directions of elective freedom may well pause to ask whether the keen words of Descartes on progress in knowledge are not worth heeding in this connection: "It is better to go a short distance on the right road than a long distance on the wrong one."

The love of freedom from control and of pleasure in our labor are splendid things. They are at once the charm and peril of student effort. The true freedom of the human spirit is the true end of the college course. This is not injured, however, by creating places where students may go, if they will, and where they must take some subjects of study which experience shows to be eminently fitted in their combination to serve this very end. We are asking simply

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for some of the central truths of history, literature, science, and philosophy, what Locke called the "teeming truths, rich in store, with which they furnish the mind, and like the lights of heaven are not only beautiful and entertaining in themselves, but give light and evidence to other things that without them could not be seen or known."<sup>1</sup>

X And as for the element of pleasure, why should we not desire it? How exquisitely did Aristotle say, "Pleasure perfects labor, even as beauty crowns youth."<sup>2</sup> Not the idle pleasure, however, but the achieved pleasure, the deep pleasure that comes from noble mastery, from winning on the hard-fought field of athletics of the mind, and, above all, from winning in the fight against intellectual sloth and easy-going indulgence—this is the crown of our best young college manhood.

A few words must suffice to set forth another peril which especially besets us at this time. It is the peril of confusion in college counsels. It has been inevitable because of the extreme diversity of educational condi-

<sup>1</sup> Of the Conduct of the Human Understanding, 43.

<sup>2</sup> Ethics, x, 4, 8.



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tions in our land and because of conflicting theories of college training.

The pole of law and the pole of freedom are the two contrasted standpoints, with many a halting-place between. It is, of course, clear that any attempt to cast all our colleges in one mold is foredoomed to failure. We must seek some other remedy. But if the present confusion can not be cured, the colleges will be seriously and permanently weakened. Here at least we must do something, and do it soon. The colleges must at all events do one thing, and that is to make it as clear as possible what it is they are severally seeking to accomplish. Certain very practical questions need to be answered. They are questions of the substance and aim of liberal education.

One of the questions is, Should a college exact a substantial amount of prescribed studies for its degree? If so, there is room to organize one or more bachelor's degrees according to the types now slowly, though imperfectly, evolving in our time. If not, the free elective plan with one bachelor's degree is the true alternative. There are many halting-places between, but none of

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them is a resting-place. Here, then, is a basis of clear division without confusion, and one that plain folk can understand. The nature of the answer given will depend on whether or no a given college believes that there are substantial studies above the stage of our preparatory schooling which are essential to the best liberal education. Intermediate or minimizing positions on this question will result in corresponding vagueness and uncertainty in organization, and will tend to perpetuate the confusion. It is worth sacrificing something, even in a transitional stage, for the sake of the assured gain that accrues to a well-defined plan. If it turns out to be a wrong plan, its defects become visible sooner and may be more promptly amended.

Let us ask a second question. Is there or is there not a proper field of college studies, exclusive of the fields of secondary, technical, and professional learning? If so, such studies alone should constitute the college course. If not, studies from the other fields may be brought in. It will not do to say no sharp line can be drawn between fields of education for the reason that the domain

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of knowledge is one, and all knowledge is liberalizing. Follow this out consistently, and important distinctions, needed to effect a working scheme of division for the parts of education, are obscured. We may distinguish between great regions, even though we are unable to settle all boundary disputes. There are enough college studies of undisputedly and eminently liberal character to fill the college course to repletion. Let those who believe this organize accordingly, and let those who believe that any respectable study possible to students of college age may be put in the college course, put such studies in. The two kinds of colleges will then be distinctly discernible.

If the college is to prevail, the confusion, though not necessarily a division of counsels, must cease. The two opposing tendencies indicate the two available lines for at least making the division clear to the country at large. Intermediate positions are unstable and transitional. They make confusion. What parents, teachers and students need to know as definitely as possible is precisely what it is a given college stands for. Uncertainty here breeds loss of con-

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fidence in liberal education. It is to be hoped that most of the colleges will be able to stand together. If they do, I hope and believe they will stand for the conviction that there are college studies essential for all who take the college course, that it is the completion of these which opens to the student the best all-round view of the knowledge most serviceable for his whole after life, and that the ideas of discipline and duty, in studies as well as in conduct, underlie any real development of the one true freedom of the human spirit.



THE LENGTH OF THE  
COLLEGE COURSE

BY

CHARLES W. ELIOT  
PRESIDENT OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY



## THE LENGTH OF THE COLLEGE COURSE<sup>1</sup>

THE period devoted to professional education has been more than doubled within the last forty years in the United States, except in the divinity schools, where three years were early required and are still required. In Judge Story's law school at Harvard the period of residence was eighteen months. It is now three years. In 1869-70 the period of required residence in the Harvard Medical School was four months in each of three years. It is now nine months in each of four years. This tendency to increase the period of professional instruction has by no means exhausted itself; and, inasmuch as the amount of professional knowledge and skill to be acquired by every student is steadily increasing, we must expect more and more time to be devoted to professional

<sup>1</sup> A paper read before the Department of Higher Education of the National Educational Association, at Boston, July 7, 1903.

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education. This tendency is by no means to be regretted. The advanced studies of professional schools supply a better training than the elementary studies of school and college; and they are generally pursued by the professional student with greater zeal and energy than either schoolboys or college students manifest; but, inasmuch as it is the interest of society and the interest of the individual that young men should be enabled to enter, well trained, on the practise of a profession by the time they are twenty-five years old, it follows that the period of training preliminary or preparatory to professional training should come to its end by the time the young men are twenty-one years old.

If we ask, next, at what age a boy who has had good opportunities may best leave his secondary school—whether a high school in a city, or a country academy, or an endowed or private school for the sons of well-to-do parents—the most reasonable answer is at the age of eighteen. At that age the average boy is ready for the liberty of a college or technical school, and will develop more rapidly in freedom than under the



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constant supervision of parents or schoolmasters. Seventeen is, for the average boy, rather young for college freedom, though safe for steady boys of exceptional maturity. Between the secondary school and the professional school, then, there can be, as a rule, only three years for the college. The American colleges have been peculiar in expecting so long a residence as four years. For the B. A. degree Oxford and Cambridge have required residence during only three years, and during much less than one-half of each of those years. Even the honor men at Cambridge are in residence, as a rule, but three years. Until recent years the American colleges doubtless needed four years because of the inadequacy of the secondary schools. These schools having steadily improved, and taken on themselves more and more of the preliminary training of well-educated youth, it is natural that the colleges should now be able to relinquish, without lowering their own standards, a portion of the time which they have heretofore claimed. What portion, is an interesting question. In the Latin countries the A. B. is given at the end of the secondary school

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course. In Germany the college course and the degree of A. B. have disappeared altogether. On this point I confine myself to stating what answer the Harvard Faculty have given to this question about the relinquishment of a portion of the time heretofore devoted to the college. The principle on which the Harvard Faculty have acted is this: They propose, in reducing the time required for the A. B. degree to three years, to make no reduction whatever in the amount of work required for that degree. In other words, they propose that the degree of A. B., taken in three years, shall represent the same amount of attainment, or power acquired, which the A. B. taken in four years has heretofore represented. Under the conditions which obtain at Harvard there is no difficulty whatever in bringing about this result. In the first place the Faculty have already pushed back into the secondary schools a good deal of work of proper school grade which used to be done in the college. Secondly, the Faculty require the young man who takes his degree in three years to pass exactly the same number of examinations on the same number of

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courses as are required of the man who takes the degree in four years. This demand can be readily met by the student, because the long summer vacations can be utilized, and the ordinary pace or rate of work of the student in the four-years' course can be considerably accelerated by the ambitious man who proposes to take his degree in three years. There are three months and two-thirds of vacation at Harvard in every academic year—a superfluous amount. The standard of work in the four-years' course for the Harvard A. B. was decidedly lower than the standard of work in any of the Harvard professional schools. It is one of the advantages of the three-year plan that it raises this standard of work during the college residence. Pursuing this general policy that the requirements for the A. B. are not to be diminished, the Harvard Faculty fixes the minimum regular residence for the Harvard A. B. at three years. They do not believe that the residence can be reduced to two years without diminishing the amount of work required for the degree. At several different times it was proposed in the Harvard Faculty that they adopt the

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principle of counting the first year spent in one of the professional schools toward the degree of A. B., as well as toward the degree of the professional school; but the Faculty always rejected that proposal, on the ground that this method implied a reduction of one-quarter in the requirements for the degree of A. B., and indeed of more than one-quarter, because the senior year ought to be a better year than the freshman year. To accentuate this determination not to abate the requirements for the degree of A. B., while shortening the period of residence, the Faculty for some years required persons who were to take the degree in three years to obtain higher marks or grades than were required of persons who took the degree in four years. This particular requirement has now been removed; but it was useful during the years of transition, because it made it evident that the three-years' man, on the average, had made greater attainments than the average four-years' man. The governing boards of the University have had precisely the same intentions as the Faculty; so that insistence on the previous sum of the attainments for the de-



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gree is the characteristic feature of the evolution at Harvard. The result has been brought about by the use of the Harvard admission examinations to raise the standards of the secondary schools, by the utilization of parts of the long summer vacation, and by encouraging students to put more work into the day and into the year while they are in residence for the A. B.

The Harvard Faculty have endeavored to hold fast to the actual facts of the case. They say nothing about an A. B. in five years, because none but men in some way disabled spend five years in getting a bachelor's degree. They do not try to bring boys to college in large number at sixteen or seventeen years of age; but they have for years advised that they come at eighteen instead of nineteen. They offer the bachelor's degree in three years or three and a half years, instead of four years, because many students can win the degree in these shorter periods of residence without any lowering of the standard. In short, they propose to hold everything they have won for the college and the degree of Bachelor of Arts, and to meet the claims of pro-

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fessional education by better organization of the whole course of education from beginning to end, by better methods of teaching, and by large and early freedom of choice among different studies.

While this change was going on in Harvard College, the University took the important step of requiring the A. B. for admission to its three oldest professional schools, first in the Divinity School, then in the Law School, and lastly in the Medical School. It had already established the Graduate School in Arts and Sciences, for admission to which a preliminary degree was, of course, required. It is unnecessary to point out that this action gives the strongest possible support to the A. B. If taken by the leading universities of the country at large, it would settle at once in the affirmative the question of the continued existence of the American college. To preserve the college the sure way is to keep down the age for leaving the secondary school, abbreviate the college course to three years, and require the A. B. for admission to university professional schools. Then we may avoid what has happened in all the nations

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of Continental Europe, namely, the disappearance of the college course for the A. B.

The requirement of the degree of Bachelor of Arts for admission to the professional schools has the happiest effect on the whole course of professional study. The classes in the professional schools become at once more homogeneous in quality, and that quality is distinctly higher than before. To believe that any other result were possible would be to discredit the college course itself.

The objections to this very decided improvement are two. It is alleged, in the first place, that the professional schools of the universities can not bear the reduction in their number of students which would follow the enforcement of this requirement. Doubtless there would be some temporary diminution in the number of students; but the experience at Harvard shows that this reduction would be only temporary. The reduction is lessened if four or five years' notice of the change is given. After a few years the reduction would be overcome. Indeed, in the Harvard Law School the number of students rapidly increased after the

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requirement of a degree for admission to the school. As a rule, the men already engaged in the practise of a profession approve and actively support all measures which tend to raise the standard of education for their profession. This pecuniary argument, therefore, may safely be regarded as one of only temporary and limited force. The other objection is a sentimental one. It is said that the requirement of a degree for admission to all professional schools would exclude some young men of remarkable powers who have had no opportunities in their earlier years to obtain a good, systematic education. The obvious answer to this objection is that the organized institutions of education are not planned for geniuses, and that geniuses do not need them. Moreover, it is not supposed that all the professional schools of the country would make this requirement. There would doubtless be plenty of private-venture schools in all the large cities which would receive young men of an appropriate age without the slightest inquiry into their preliminary education. That is the case to-day, and the proposed change in university policy would, of course,



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be an advantage to such schools. The question before us, in this Department of Higher Education, is what the universities ought to do. I urge that the universities should maintain each its present standard for the degree of Bachelor of Arts, but should permit young men who are capable of reaching that standard in three years of residence to take the degree in three years; and, secondly, that, with notice of not less than four years, they should require some bachelor's degree in arts or sciences for admission to their professional schools. The long notice will enable parents, schools, and the whole community to adapt themselves to the change. The greater the number of universities which unite in this movement, the more easily will it be brought about.

It will be observed, perhaps, that I have said nothing about the degree of Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Philosophy. My reason is that I regard those degrees as only temporary and inferior substitutes for the traditional degree of Bachelor of Arts. I believe that these lesser degrees will disappear as soon as an adequate variety of studies is allowed to count toward the de-

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gree of Bachelor of Arts. Toward this admirable consummation the Harvard Faculty have already taken some important steps. Thus, many college studies can be counted toward the degree of Bachelor of Science; and many of the studies originally introduced into the University through the Scientific School may be counted toward the degree of Bachelor of Arts. Again, in 1903 and thereafter, the requirements for admission to the Scientific School represent as large an amount of work done at the secondary school as the requirements for admission to Harvard College, although the number of options is larger in the Scientific School requirements. A very moderate increase in the number of required studies for admission to the Scientific School, and in the number of optional studies allowed for admission to Harvard College, would make the requirements for admission to the two departments identical. For a time, in the development of the American universities, there was a strong tendency to multiply bachelor degrees. For ten years past the tendency has been all the other way. Until this simplification is brought about, how-

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ever, the requirement for admission to the university professional schools will have to be a bachelor's degree in arts or sciences, this description including the miscellaneous degrees in letters, philosophy, engineering, etc.

Finally, if a degree in arts or sciences is to be required for admission to university professional schools, the road to such a degree should be as smooth and broad as possible. No exclusive prescriptions should obstruct it; and the various needs of the individual pupil should be carefully provided for in both school and college.





**THE LENGTH OF THE  
COLLEGE COURSE**

**BY**

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## THE LENGTH OF THE COLLEGE COURSE<sup>1</sup>

THE American college is the vital center of our system of higher education. With all its imperfections, it serves, as probably no other institution can serve, to uphold the standards of the secondary schools and to lift from below the level of professional schools. It occupies an intermediate field of its own, not perfectly defined, but as clearly defined as the fields of our secondary or professional education. It should be allowed and encouraged, as they are, to organize itself completely and efficiently according to the laws of its own life, without curtailment or encroachment. Otherwise we shall be in the absurd and uncivilized position of refusing to try for the best college education, and shall be sacrificing to commercial and utilitarian demands the one educational

<sup>1</sup> Read before the National Educational Association (Department of Higher Education) at Boston, July 7, 1903.

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agency most needed to purify and elevate the too materialistic tone of our American life.

By tradition the length of the college course is four years. This is almost universal. There seems to be no good reason *à priori* why it should have been four, rather than five or three, or even two. But the practical unanimity of the tradition indicates that thus far, at least, the period of four years has been found to be well suited to our needs. Analyze this as we may, it is a definite result of long and wide experience and one which should not be discarded without the fullest consideration.

It is argued, however, that conditions are changing and that a shorter time must be allotted if we would save the American college. This argument rests mainly on the increasing age of the student at entrance to college and the lengthening courses of the professional schools. The fact that college graduates are kept back from entering business life until they are twenty-two need not disturb us on economic grounds, because it is also a fact that the marked increase of college graduates in business life has coin-



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cided with the very period in which the age of graduation has been rising. But for those going into professional life the case is different. Taking eighteen as the average age of entrance to college, adding four years of college and three or, as it may soon be, four years of professional study, the young doctor or lawyer is not fledged until he is twenty-six. A year, or even two years, may be saved by reducing the length of the college course.

Let us admit, at once, that we are facing a serious economic question. The saving of a year or two in time and money will in many cases settle the question as to how extended an education a young man can get. Young men who must get to law or medicine by twenty-four must forego something if they enter college at eighteen. No device will secure them eight years of educated life in six. The brighter and more mature among them may perhaps save a year by entering college at seventeen. But this does not meet the general difficulty. If by any chance they enter at sixteen, they will be found as a rule too immature mentally for the studies and too immature morally for

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the life of our larger modern colleges. This solution may therefore be dismissed as insufficient and unwise. If the year or two years is to be saved, it must be taken in most instances from the college or from the professional school.

We may as well admit that in such cases the college must suffer the loss, because the intending doctor or lawyer can not escape the demands of the professional schools. His livelihood is conditioned on completing his professional education, and this settles the matter.

But does it settle the general question of the proper length of the college course for those who have time to take it? What are we to do with the mass of students who can take four years of college? Why must their course be shortened? It is a minority which goes on to law and medicine. Some better reason must be found than the fact that a part of this minority can not remain four years. If it were true, or if it becomes true, that the majority of young men suitable for college can not stay throughout the present course, then it may be a shorter course must be established. Otherwise it

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does not appear that we are doing a wrong to students by holding them four years, unless it can also be shown that a three-year or a two-year course is intrinsically better than a four-year course for American young men.

This is to me the one question of real difficulty. I am unable to see that young men generally will be better trained to begin as lawyers at twenty-four than at twenty-five or twenty-six. I am able to see that many can not afford to wait so long, and must take what they can get in the shorter time. It is clear that some of them can not take four years in college. It is also clear that giving them the bachelor's degree at the end of two years or three years will not give them an education of four years. It is the time taken, as well as the studies taken, that counts heavily if a permanent impression is to be made. Extended time in residence given to unhurried study, and not rapidly formed acquaintance with a series of studies, is what is needed. And when we realize with what imperfect training so many boys come from the schools, it may easily take four years to outflank their

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deficiencies, correct their methods, and develop even a semblance of liberal culture.

Why, then, if some of them must leave college, should they not leave, as some now do, at the end of two years or three years, taking with them their valuable half-loaf or three-quarters loaf of college life and training? It is worth a great deal to them. They will find most of the professional schools ready to receive them, and some of them ready to give, if not the very best, at least a good professional education. The best of everything in education can not be had without taking the best time needed. In fact we are exaggerating the situation, for if all professional schools would merely go so far as to exact at least two years of college as prerequisite to entrance, there would be a gain the country over in the quality of professional students. It may, perhaps, be thought that the three-year course will bring more students to college and more college graduates to professional schools. This is a matter of pure speculation. But suppose it does. Is it clear that we need more college students with shorter education than they have now? Is it clear



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that we need proportionally more doctors and lawyers? The desired gain in quality of professional students can be secured without destroying the four-year course, merely by exacting generally three years of college as a minimum entrance requirement. Has any American university gone farther than this in dealing with the students of its own college who enter its own law or medical school?

In the present condition of affairs in our land, viewed in its entirety, the question of entrance to professional schools and the question of the proper length of the college course are two distinct questions. By all means let there be a few leaders among the professional schools exacting a college degree for admission, especially if it be possible to secure this on the basis of a full college course completed in the full time without haste or crowding. The time may perhaps come when all good schools will be able to follow their example. But it has not come yet.

If, therefore, the college course is to be shortened, it should be because the shorter course is intrinsically better for the mass of

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college students. Is four years of American college education better than three? Few will doubt it is better than two. Three years or four is the real question.

X That a change of profound importance has come over our colleges in the last thirty years none will deny. It is a change in tone and spirit. The gains in diversified opportunity and in student self-government have been immense. There have also been losses. In the large older colleges particularly there has been an accession of students who are attracted more by the social and athletic life than by studies. There has been a relaxing of effort, a disposition to look on college life as a pleasant social episode. The old-fashioned college with its simple programme of prescribed studies is gone. The so-called "elective system" has come in to replace it, wholly or partly. To rehabilitate the old state of things is impossible and undesirable. To endure the disintegration and confusion in intellectual standards which has ensued is also undesirable and, I believe, impossible. The strength of opinion favorable to the four-year course is found to be greatest where a

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large basis of prescribed studies has been kept. The arguments for a shorter course are most influential where elective freedom prevails most. It is possible to argue with much effect for four years when it can be shown that a fine education is given because of the very definite correlation of studies to one end—namely, the acquainting of young men not only with the methods of knowledge, but with the substance of things important for all liberally educated men to know, the elemental things which, taken together, represent the stock and staple of our intellectual inheritance as a race. This takes considerable time. Supplement this with a first exploration into the fields, or, far better, into some definitely mapped field of elective freedom corresponding to the well-ascertained aptitudes rather than the chance likings of the student, and four years will be found none too much. A natural break between the two lower and two upper years may thus easily be made. At this time, if the hard necessity arises so soon, let men leave who must leave early. The bachelor's degree may then be kept for those who do the full work

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in the normal time. From this point of view the four-year course is in every way worth maintaining.

But if the principle is to prevail that, once in college, the student is to find all studies elective, the case is very different. No definite programme is completed for the mass of students so far as concerns the specific substance of what they study. And without this an important common element is subtracted. A certain effect is lost. The common area of liberal culture, in which all educated men should be at home, tends to shrink and vanish. The solidarity of the student community, the intense *esprit de corps* which accompanies movement by college classes, the intimacy of the community in things of common intellectual acquaintance—all these are weakened by dispersion. The students are not traveling near enough in the same direction to be within easy hail and call. Such a condition is anomalous in education. Secondary education below gains its effect from the correlation of prescribed studies, so as to form a general gymnastic of the mind. Professional education above is unattainable without the



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mastery of correlated subjects prescribed for all. The inner relations of the subjects studied, and not the preferences of immature minds, form the basis for an organized course of study, and should have much to do, perhaps most to do, with determining the length of any course. College education alone, under the plan of free election, is being allowed to wander aimlessly, as though there were no general and necessary rational relations according to which college studies should be combined as they are in other fields of education. The student's preference, so often determined by inadequate knowledge or an easy-going following of the line of least resistance, is dignified by the name of "election," and the bewildering mass of elective studies offered him is seriously called a "system." "System" it may be to others, but not to him.

How can a definite argument for a discipline and culture of four years, rather than of three years, be erected on such a basis? We need not waste time in exploring the tangle of inner reasons which indicate that the indefiniteness and heterogeneity of a free elective course may be a proper, even

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an urgent, reason for shortening it. The mere fact that the movement for a three-year course is strongest where elective freedom is least restricted is enough indication that a powerful cause operating inside the college course to shorten it is the inability of a purely elective scheme to fill out four years with profit to the mass of students.

✓ If the proposal were made to change a four-year course in elective studies to a three-year course with a large basis of prescribed studies, I confess the three-year course would seem to me a marked improvement. And unless something is done to reduce the tangle to order, the three-year course seems to be inevitable in some places. But if the proposal be to reduce the other type of four-year course to three years, then the loss is not only unnecessary, but is in every way undesirable, because it means the loss of the crowning year in a definitely rounded plan, the consummate college year of intellectual development, privilege and satisfaction.

✕ On the colleges, therefore, which believe in maintaining a large basis of prescribed studies as the one sure foundation for a

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rational plan of subsequent elective studies will rest the duty of maintaining a four-year course. They will need to make sure that they work out their programme in true accordance with their academic confession of faith and secure to their students at all hazards the few fundamental studies, well and amply taught. They will need to be resolute in teaching young men that there is no real education without well-directed effort; that it is not doing what a man likes or dislikes to do, but the constant exercise in doing what he ought to do in matters of intellect as well as of conduct, whether he happens to like it or not, that turns the frank, careless, immature, lovable school-boy into the strong, well-trained man capable of directing wisely himself and others. If they fail to do this with measurable success, they fail to justify their contention. If they succeed, the American college course of traditional length and largely prescribed content may be trusted to justify itself triumphantly.





**THE LENGTH OF THE  
COLLEGE COURSE**

**BY**

**WILLIAM R. HARPER**

**PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO**



## THE LENGTH OF THE COLLEGE COURSE <sup>1</sup>

IN view of the time allotted, I limit my statement to the presentation of some considerations which appear to me to be distinctly opposed to the proposition to make three years the normal period of residence for the college course instead of four.

Some students are, unquestionably, able to complete the course in three years. About the same number should perhaps, to do the work equally well, take five years. The question before us, however, is not one that relates to a small proportion of the students who enter college—the very brightest or the very dullest. It is a question which has to do with the normal college course—that is, the course of study intended for the average student.

It is easy to point out the origin of the

<sup>1</sup> Read before the National Educational Association (Department of Higher Education) at Boston, July 7, 1903.

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difficulty which confronts us and has given rise to the proposition itself. It is a survival of the old idea which made the college curriculum something rigid, something into conformity with which every student must be brought, rather than something which should be made to conform to each individual student. It is not inconsistent with this suggestion that the first discussion of the question took place in an atmosphere friendly to the elective policy in distinction from the policy of a fixed curriculum. Adaptation to the needs of the individual along certain lines did not in this case carry with it flexibility and adaptation in other lines. It is not an adaptation of the college course to the needs of individual men to propose that the course shall be a three-year one. An adaptation would permit four years for those who need four years, five years for those who need five years, and three years for those who are able to do the work in three years.

1. The proposition for a three-year course is based upon the supposition that the entire work of the college course is really university work. This is a mistaken sup-



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position. The work of the freshman and sophomore years is ordinarily of the same scope and character as that of the preceding years in the academy or high school. To cut off a full year means either the crowding of this higher preparatory or college work of the freshman and sophomore years, or the shortening of the real university work done in the junior and senior years of the college course. The adoption of either of these alternatives will occasion a serious loss to the student. The average man is not prepared to take up university work until he has reached the end of the sophomore year. No greater mistake is being made in the field of higher education than the confusion which is coming to exist between college and university methods of work. The adoption of a three-year college term will only add to a confusion already great.

2. The suggestion rests upon an incorrect idea as to the age of students beginning work. The average age of students entering college to-day is about the same as it was twenty-five and fifty years ago. The average age of students leaving college to-day is about the same as it was twenty-five

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or fifty years ago. The serious difficulty lies in the fact that the demands of professional education are greater to-day than they were twenty-five or fifty years ago, and that, instead of courses of professional study extending over two years, we are confronted with courses of professional study extending over three or four years. It is a point of special interest, however, that, although the requirements for entrance to college are so much greater than they were in former years, the student masters these requirements and enters at practically the same age. In other words, better educational facilities have made it possible to graduate the young man at the same age, but with nearly two years of additional work. With all this gain it is apparent to any student of the situation that even yet there is great waste, and that a better arrangement of the curriculum in the earlier stages of educational work will make it possible for one or two additional years to be gained. With the multiplication of high schools and their greater efficiency, and with the consequent improvement in the grammar schools, much may be expected. It is

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reasonable to suppose that a practical limit has been reached so far as concerns the requirements for admission to college. With this limit fixed, it is not unreasonable to expect that on the basis of the present requirements a boy may reach college one or two years earlier within the next decade. This will counterbalance the increase of time required in the professional schools referred to above. It is therefore unnecessary to shorten the college course merely to provide for an extension of the professional course.

3. The proposition is based upon a wrong idea of the high school. This institution is no longer a school preparatory for college. In its most fully developed form it covers at least one-half the ground of the college of fifty years ago. It is a real college; at all events, it provides the earlier part of a college course. Its work may not be separated from that of the freshman and sophomore years either in method or scope. Many high schools are actually moving forward to include in their curriculum the work of the freshman and sophomore years. In these schools the entire college course, as it was known fifty years ago, besides the addi-

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tional work in science which at that time was unknown, is included. This development of the high school has a significant bearing upon the question before us. How is this new college, the product of our own generation, to be brought into relationship with the old college which has come down to us from our ancestors? The correct appreciation of the modern high school and its proper adjustment to the situation as a whole makes strongly against the proposed three-year course.

4. The adoption of the three-year policy by the larger institutions would be followed immediately by an increase of requirements for admission to the first year of college work. This fact is seen in the history of the college of the Johns Hopkins University. While high schools as such show a tendency to increase the scope of their work, and while this tendency is certainly to be encouraged, such increase should be accepted as a substitute for the work of the college, but not as an additional requirement for admission to the college. Our present difficulties have their origin partly in the fact that from time to time we have increased



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the requirements for admission to college, until, as has already been pointed out, a fairly good college course of instruction is now obtained before the so-called college work begins. This is an evil which should be corrected, and its correction lies in the direction of reducing the requirements for admission rather than in increasing them. The evil would be intensified by the adoption of the three-year policy.

5. The proposition is based upon the supposition that the time requirement is the essential thing. Starting from the tradition that the college course must be four years for all men of whatever grade, it proceeds upon the assumption that, for various reasons, this period, now the same for all students, must continue to be the same for all students, namely, the three-year period. No idea has exerted a more injurious influence in the history of the college work than that the period of four years, however employed, if spent in college residence, guaranteed a college education. It is questionable whether the time limit in the undergraduate course is any more important a factor than the time limit in the work for the doctor's

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degree. This fondness for a time limit, which is the fundamental basis of the three-year proposition, is a survival of the old class system which disappeared long ago in the larger institutions, and is beginning to show decadence even in the smaller institutions.

6. The proposition is likewise to be opposed because of its deleterious influence upon the smaller colleges. The American college is the glory of American spiritual life, and its existence must not be endangered. Granting that the larger institutions could adopt without injury the three-year plan, it would be impossible for the smaller colleges so to do. Two things would follow: (*a*) the decadence of the better colleges of this class, and (*b*) the adoption of the policy by colleges only slightly above the grade of high schools. When it comes to be seen that the college system is adjusted in its entirety with a view to its relationship to the professional schools, and that it is only a second college course following a first college course already received in the high school, the tendency will be to go directly from the high school to the university

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—a tendency to be discouraged as urgently as possible. Moreover, the colleges of lower grade will at once reduce their period to one of three years, even though their curriculum be greatly inferior to that of the larger institutions. In other words, the step proposed, in spite of protestations to the contrary, means, in the end, a lowering of requirements throughout the field of higher education.

7. Less than four years for a boy who enters college at the right age, sixteen or seventeen, is too short a time. The adoption, however, of the three-year course will compel every boy to limit his college course to three years. This is a serious difficulty. On the present basis he may take one, two, three, or four years, according to circumstances. On the new plan he would be limited to three years, so far as college work is concerned. With the immense increase in attendance at college which has come within the last decade on the four-year basis, why should we deliberately plan to reduce the time to three years? Surely a preparation will be needed in the years to come as full and long as in the years that are past.

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The one place in which it is unnecessary and undesirable to cut down the time of those who are willing and able to take four years is in the college period. Let the time be shortened in the earlier years, but at this stage of preparation, with the great number of subjects which may profitably be considered, let us have all the time possible.

8. The suggestion of the third-year course ignores the culture value of the subjects in the first year of professional work. For my own part I can not conceive any work more valuable to a young man or woman, from the point of view of citizenship and general culture, than the first year's work in the curriculum of the law school, the medical school, the divinity school, or the school of education. In any one of these groups the student is brought into contact with living questions. The fact that the method of professional schools is different is, in the majority of cases, a distinct advantage, and in no case an injury, since it serves as a corrective of a tendency toward diletanteism unquestionably encouraged by the more lax methods of the later years of college work. If any one question has been



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settled in the educational discussion of the last quarter of a century, it is that a line is no longer to be drawn between this class of subjects and that, on the ground that one group, and not the other, may be regarded as culture-producing. The opportunity to elect subjects of this character in the last year of the college course does not injure the integrity of the college. It must be confessed that the adoption of this policy by larger institutions introduces a difficulty for the smaller institutions, but this difficulty is not insuperable, and several ways have been already suggested for meeting it.

9. The proposition, as already hinted, subordinates the college almost wholly to the professional school. It is largely because of the increased demands of the professional schools that it seems necessary to shorten the college course. This does not seem to be in harmony with the fact that a comparatively small number of students really expect to enter professional schools. Why should students who do not have the professional school in mind be required to shorten the term of college residence? If it is answered that the student who enters

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any line of business activity needs the year thus saved in order that he may begin his work earlier, it may be said that the facts do not bear out this proposition; and, in any case, a year of business is not to be treated as a year of college work in the sense that it is equivalent to the first year's course of study in a professional school. It is therefore as inexpedient to adjust the whole college policy to the supposed needs of a minority who are planning to enter the professional school as it is to adjust the whole policy of a high school to the needs of a minority who enter college.

10. In conclusion it is to be urged in opposition to the proposed movement that it is in general contrary to the drift of educational movements, and that the very thing which it proposes can easily be secured by other means. Among other educational tendencies to-day may be cited (*a*) that of the high school to enlarge its scope and add to its curriculum one or two years of additional work; (*b*) that of strengthening of the faculties and curriculum of the average smaller college; (*c*) that of avoiding the waste in the earlier years, and the conse-

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quent possibility of college entrance at an earlier age; (*d*) that of distinct separation between college and university methods. To each and all of these the proposition stands opposed.

Following the example of one of the speakers this morning, I would suggest that the plan which has been in operation at the University of Chicago for nearly ten years has seemed to many of us to meet in large measure the demands called for this morning. This plan provides a course of four years and a course of two years. It permits students of exceptional ability to do the work in three years. It makes it possible for those who so desire to prolong the work to five years. It is adapted to the needs of individual or different classes. With the completion of the two-year course a certificate is given, granting the title of Associate in the University. This, for the present, is sufficient in the way of a degree. To students who maintain a standing of the highest grade certain concessions are made.

The details of the plan have been worked out as experience has indicated the need. The provision of a two-year course meets

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the need of many who can not take a longer term of residence, and likewise of many who ought not to take a longer course. The provision of a normal four-year course meets the need of the average man or woman. This plan does not imply that this average man or woman who spends four years in residence is particularly stupid, or that a year has been wasted.

It is believed, from an experience of ten or more years, that it contains the solution of at least many of the points now under discussion.



**THE LENGTH OF THE  
COLLEGE COURSE**

**BY**

**NICHOLAS MURRAY BUTLER**

**PRESIDENT OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**



## THE LENGTH OF THE COLLEGE COURSE<sup>1</sup>

IN my judgment most participants in the discussion now going on throughout the land as to the length of the baccalaureate course and the preparation for the professional schools err in supposing that the two questions are necessarily reducible to one, and also in taking hold of that one by the wrong end. The nature, content, and proper length of the baccalaureate course are matters quite independent of the proper standards of professional education and are entitled to consideration on their own merits.

The one question to which the two are usually reduced is taken hold by the wrong end when it is said that the baccalaureate course should be of a stated length, say four years or three years, and that everything

<sup>1</sup> Read before the Department of Higher Education of the National Educational Association, at Boston, on Tuesday, July 7, 1903.

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else in education and in life must adapt itself accordingly. Those who take this stand give us no clear notion of (1) where the baccalaureate course begins, (2) what it consists of, or (3) what it exists for. They assume that all of these points are clearly understood and generally agreed upon. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Not even the so-called reputable colleges are in anything approaching agreement as to the standard to be enforced for admission to the baccalaureate course; and while there is an external pretense of unanimity as to what the baccalaureate course exists for, that course is, nevertheless, in too many instances, fearfully and wonderfully made. Dr. Wayland said, over sixty years ago, that "there is nothing magical or imperative in the term of four years, nor has it any natural relation to a course of study. It was adopted as a matter of accident, and can have, by itself, no important bearing on the subject in hand." To suppose that a four-year baccalaureate course is necessary *semper, ubique, ab omnibus*, is to elevate an accident to the plane of a principle.

Others take hold of the question by the



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middle. They fix an arbitrary age at which professionally trained men should be ready for active work in life, and after subtracting the sum of the years that they propose to allot to the elementary school, the secondary school, and the professional school, the remaining years, three, or perhaps two, are held to be sufficient for the college.

Both of these methods appear to me to be arbitrary and unscientific, although the former is the usual academic mode of settling the question and has behind it the support of uncritical public opinion.

One of the worst of all educational evils is that of quantitative standards, and it persists surprisingly in the discussion of college and university problems. Every higher course of study that I know of, except only that of graduate work leading to the degree of doctor of philosophy at the best universities, is primarily quantitative. These courses are all based on time spent, not upon performance. The adjustment of the period of work to the capacity of individual students, now so common in elementary schools and not unusual in secondary schools, is almost wholly absent from the

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colleges. The "lock-step" is seen there to perfection, and class after class of one hundred or even two hundred members moves forward (with the exception of a few delinquents) as if all its members were cast in a common mold. The place of the baccalaureate course and its standards will never be established on sound principles until the question of its length is made subordinate to those relating to its content and its purpose. Moreover, it is quite unreasonable to assume that the baccalaureate course should be of one and the same length for everybody. By the term "baccalaureate course" I mean those liberal studies in the arts and sciences that naturally and historically follow the secondary school period.

My own views on the questions at issue are, briefly, these:

+ 1. The baccalaureate or college course of study of the liberal arts and sciences should be preserved at all hazards as an essential part of our educational organization. It is distinctively American and a very powerful factor in the upbuilding of the nation's culture and idealism. It should be treated as a thing of value in and for itself, and not

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merely as an incident to graduate study or to professional schools.

2. The college course is in serious danger by reason of the fact that the secondary school is reaching up into its domain on the one hand and the professional school is reaching down into it on the other. Purely professional subjects in law, medicine, engineering, and architecture are widely accepted as part of the baccalaureate or college course by university colleges, and now independent colleges in different parts of the country are trying various devices with a view to doing the same thing. If this tendency continues unchecked, at many institutions there will soon be little left of the old baccalaureate course but the name.

3. To preserve the college is (*a*) to fix and enforce a standard of admission which can be met normally by a combined elementary and secondary school course of not more than ten years well-spent, and (*b*) to keep out of the baccalaureate course purely professional subjects pursued for professional ends by professional methods. The college course, in other words, should be constructed for itself alone and for the in-

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tellectual, moral, and spiritual needs of the youth of our time, without reference or regard to specific careers. This course must be widely elective, and so offer material to enrich and develop minds of every type. This course is the best preparation for the professional study of law, medicine, divinity, engineering, architecture, and teaching, simply because it does what it does for the human mind and the human character, and not because it is so hammered and beaten as to serve as a conduit to a particular career or careers.

4. This course should be entered upon at seventeen, or in some cases at sixteen. Eighteen is too late for the normal boy; the boy who has had every educational advantage and is not ready to meet any existing college entrance test before he is eighteen has been dawdling and weakening his mental powers by keeping them too long in contact with merely elementary studies.

5. For the boy who enters college at seventeen and who looks forward to a career as scholar, as teacher, or as man of affairs, four years is, ordinarily, not too long a time to spend in liberal studies. On the



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other hand, the boy who, entering college at seventeen, proposes to take up later the study of a profession in a university, ought not to be compelled to spend four years upon liberal studies just at that time in his life. To compel him to do so is to advance the standard of professional education arbitrarily without in any way raising it. It is a fallacy to suppose that the more time a boy spends in study the more he knows and the more he grows. Whether he grows by study depends entirely upon whether he is studying subjects adapted to his needs, his interests, and his powers. Pedagogues suppose that the more time a boy spends in school and college the better; educators know the contrary. There is a time to leave off as well as a time to begin. A boy *can* develop intellectual apathy in college as well as knowledge, weakness of will as well as strength of character.

6. The earlier parts of professional courses in law, medicine, engineering and the like are most excellent material for the boy of nineteen or twenty. He should begin them at that time and complete his four years of professional study by twenty-three

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or twenty-four. To postpone his professional course later than this is not only to waste his time, but to waste his mind, which is far worse.

7. There should be a college course two years in length, carefully constructed as a thing by itself and not merely the first part of a three-year or a four-year course, which will enable intending professional students to spend this time as advantageously as possible in purely liberal studies. The university colleges can establish such a course readily enough; the independent colleges will have to establish such a course or see their influence and prestige steadily decline. To try to meet the new situation by simply reproducing all present conditions on a three-year scale instead of on a four-year scale is a case of *solvitur ambulando*. The shortening of the college to three years for all students involves an unnecessary sacrifice. As usually defended this policy involves no educational principle, but merely concedes a year of liberal study to the modern demand for haste and hurry.

8. Whether the completion of such a two-year course should be crowned with a de-

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gree is to me a matter of indifference. Degrees are the tinsel of higher education and not its reality. Such a two-year course as I have in mind would imply a standard of attainment at least as high as that required for the degree of A. B. in 1860, which had many characteristics that we of to-day persistently undervalue. If this discussion could be diverted from degrees to real educational standards it would be a great gain. The compromise plan as to degrees, now becoming so popular, whereby the baccalaureate degree is given either for two years of college study and two years of work in a professional school or for three years of college study and one year of work in a professional school, is disastrous to the integrity of the college course. It deliberately shortens the college course by one year or two while proclaiming a four-year college course. It is a policy that only university colleges can adopt; independent colleges must suffer if it becomes a fixed and permanent policy.

9. The most difficult point to establish, apparently, is that at which the baccalaureate course should begin. Colleges with

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courses nominally four years in length are admitting students with from one to two years' less preparation than is demanded by other colleges with four-year courses. The lax enforcement of published requirements for admission, together with the wide acceptance of certificates from uninspected and unvisited schools, has demoralized college standards very generally. It does not make much difference how long the baccalaureate course is if it does not begin anywhere.

10. A university ought not to admit to its professional schools students who have not had a college course of liberal study, or its equivalent. A minimum course of two years of such study should be insisted upon. A four-year course should not be required for the two reasons (1) that it delays too long entrance upon active life-work and (2) that it does not use the time and effort of the intending professional student to the best advantage.

11. For a university to admit professional students direct from the secondary schools is to throw the weight of its influence against the spirit and ideals of college train-



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ing, and to prepare for the so-called learned professions a large body of very imperfectly educated men. To say that any other procedure is undemocratic is not only a grave misuse of words, but is to imply that the universities should not struggle to give this democracy what it most needs, namely, well-educated and highly trained professional service.

(1)

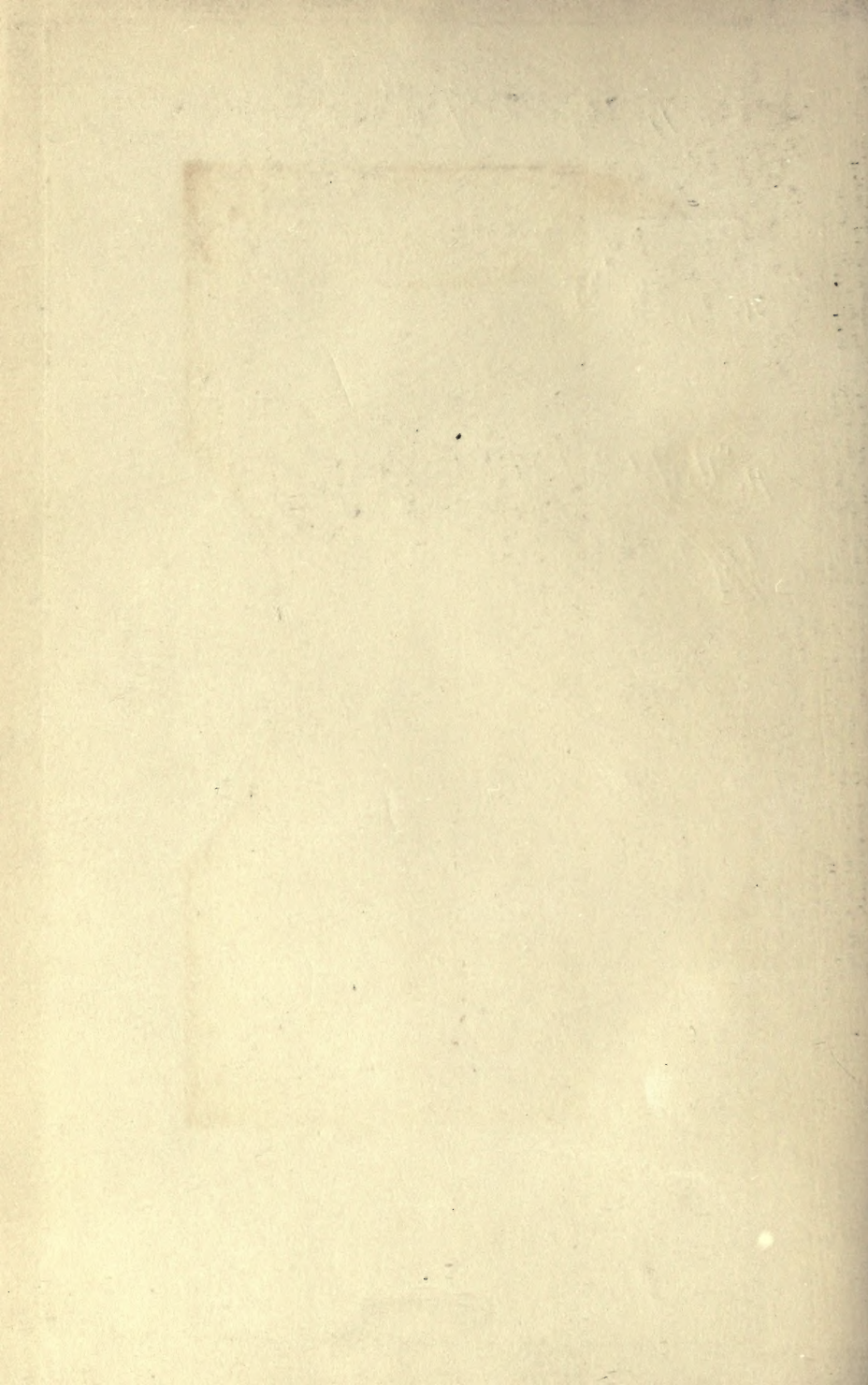


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